



SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Priority Theme

Statement by Mrs. Deborah O'Hara Rusckowski Adviser

(Check Against Delivery)

Dear Mr. Chair,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and to contribute to this discussion.

As a sovereign entity, the Order of Malta remains independent and neutral. The Order has many works which directly relieve suffering regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, or religious beliefs and has done so for over 900 years. It is committed to serving the sick and the poor. In conjunction with its worldwide relief arm, Malteser International, the Order of Malta implements humanitarian projects through the cooperation of local, national and international partnerships to advance the achievement of the Beijing Platform, especially the SDGs related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

We of course support the year's priority theme of the 60th Commission on the Status of Women and are committed in standing with the United Nations community, many who are represented here today, to improve the lives of women and girls everywhere.

Mr. Chair,

We know women suffer violence and discrimination, including human trafficking, in all parts of the world and gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. This has become even more evident in some of the tragic episodes we are witnessing in the current migrant and refugee crises.

Empowering women with education, access to decent work, fair wages and access to quality healthcare for their children and family members, will allow societies to thrive economically, spurring productivity and growth.

When a community can offer healthcare to improve the health of its members, all members become more productive. Creativity and ambition are released and job creation emerges. This results in economic growth and improved quality of life for all. This can be seen in areas where a focus has been made on improving healthcare and creative jobs have been born, such as women's micro-businesses in textile, clothing and food products. Where undesirable practices prevail, as in the case of FGM, programs that educate must be continued or initiated.

Mr. Chair,

The Order of Malta believes more can be done to accelerate progress in the area of women's empowerment. The movement for gender equality must begin at the grassroots level. Several examples can be given, but allow me to provide two.

1. First, is in a village in the northern department of Haiti called Milot. There, a full service hospital has been operated by members of the Order for almost 30 years. After the 2010 earthquake, a strong emphasis was placed on women's health programs to provide pre-natal care, safe deliveries and post-natal care. Education to women, couples and 'community agents' was critical given the 2500 births annually. A fertility education program, proven successful in Uganda and Zimbabwe, was started where women were taught to observe and document physical symptoms using a bead system, which is color-coded to facilitate use by illiterate couples. This provided a natural and inexpensive form of family planning, along with employment opportunities to teach the method to others.
2. The Holy Family Hospital, the Order of Malta's flagship hospital in Bethlehem, also provides respectful, dignified health care to all women and children of all religions in the region – from both Palestine and Israel. Mobile medical clinics provide outreach to those incapable of traveling to the hospital.

These are just a couple of examples. However, at the core is a common denominator: strong, intelligent, resilient women who, with just a little help, can be the force to carry our generation to the next level in achieving the CSW's goals.

Allow me to conclude, that the Order joins others who have spoken here in support of placing the highest value on traditional families – it is there that we all learn the basis of human rights. We too share the conviction that protection of the family is the way to achieve the CSW SDGs.

I thank you Mr. Chair.